

CLAIMS

We claim:

1 1. A method for distributing purchasing incentives to retail customers,
2 comprising the following steps performed at a central site in cooperation with a
3 communication device at a customer site:

4 logging in a remotely located customer using identity data and region data
5 transmitted by the customer over a communication network;

6 transmitting over the communication network a plurality of incentive
7 offers to the registered customer, the incentive offers being exercisable in the customer's
8 region;

9 receiving incentive offer selection data from the customer over the
10 communication network, the offer selection data including the designation of a retailer
11 at which selected offer or offers may be exercised;

12 generating a purchasing incentive containing in encoded form the identity
13 of the retailer designated by the customer and the identity of the customer; and

14 transmitting at least one incentive to the customer over the communication
15 network, wherein the transmitted incentive is encoded with the identity of the retailer
16 selected by the customer.

1 2. A method as defined in claim 1, and further comprising the step of:
2 communicating with the customer concerning the use of other shopping
3 aids.

1 3. A method as defined in claim 2, wherein the step of communicating
2 with the customer includes:

3 transmitting a list of products available for purchase;

4 receiving customer selections from the list of products; and

5 transmitting a shopping list to the customer.

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1 5. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting a
2 plurality of incentive offers includes transmitting incentive offers from specific product
3 manufacturers.

7. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of generating a purchase incentive includes:

- converting textual and numeric information provided by the customer to graphical form;
- converting other textual and numeric information to graphical form; and
- merging the converted information with other graphical information defining the incentive, to form a composite graphical incentive image for transmission to the customer.

1 8. A method as defined in claim 7, wherein the step of generating a
2 purchase incentive further includes:
3 generating a complex graphical background pattern for the incentive
4 image; and
5 merging the background information with the textual, numeric and other

6 graphical information in the incentive image.

1 9. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting at
2 least one incentive includes:

3 transmitting only an advisory message to the customer; and

4 transmitting the terms of the incentive directly to the retail store selected
5 by the customer, for use by the customer on a subsequent visit to the store.

6 10. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting at
7 least one incentive includes:

8 transmitting only an incentive token to the customer; and

9 transmitting the terms of the incentive directly to the retail store selected
10 by the customer, for use by the customer, who brings the token to the store on a
11 subsequent visit.

1 11. A method for distributing purchasing incentives and other shopping
2 aids to customers over a communication network, the method comprising the steps of:

3 logging in as a customer by providing at least an individual identification,
4 a postal region code, and retail store selection;

5 transmitting from a central site and receiving at a remote customer site,
6 a plurality of incentive offers, each of which is exercisable only in the customer's postal
7 region;

8 selecting at the customer site one or more of the incentive offers and
9 transmitting these selections back to the central site;

10 generating at least one purchasing incentive containing in encoded form
11 the identity of the retail store selected by the customer and the identity of the customer;
12 and

13 transmitting the at least one incentive to the customer.

1 12. A method as defined in claim 11, and further comprising:

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2 in response to a customer's action, transmitting a shopping list to the
3 customer for selection of products;
4 receiving the customers selection of products on the shopping list; and
5 transmitting a customer-specific shopping list to the customer as a
6 shopping aid.

1 13. A method as defined in claim 11, and further comprising:
2 in response to a customer's action, transmitting a recipe list to the
3 customer for possible selection of a recipe;
4 receiving the customer's selection of one or more recipes; and
5 transmitting a complete recipe to the customer, including a list of
6 ingredients, and transmitting any purchasing incentives tied to ingredients of the recipe.

1 14. A method as defined in claim 11, wherein the step of transmitting a
2 plurality of incentive offers includes:
3 transmitting one set of incentive offers originating from product
4 manufacturers; and
5 transmitting another set of incentive offers originating from product
6 retailers.

1 15. A system for distributing purchasing incentives to retail customers,
2 comprising:
3 a communication network establishing two-way communication between
4 a central site and each of a plurality of customer devices;
5 a file at the central site containing a plurality of incentive offers;
6 a computer located at the central site, the computer including
7 means for storing customer information at the central site, based
8 on information transmitted from any of the customer devices to the central
9 site computer, over the communication network, the customer information
10 including geographical region data and identification data;

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23. A method for distributing purchasing incentives and other shopping aids to customers over a communication network, the method comprising the steps of:

3 logging in as a customer by providing at least a customer id. used by the
4 customer in purchase transactions a retail store, and a customer postal region;

5 transmitting from a central site and receiving at a remote customer site,
6 a plurality of incentive offers, each of which is exercisable based on the customer's
7 postal region, at least one of the offers being based on the customer's prior shopping
8 behavior as determined from the customer id.;

9 selecting at the customer site one or more of the incentive offers and
10 transmitting these selections back to the central site;

11 generating at least one purchasing incentive selected by the customer; and
12 transmitting the at least one incentive to the customer.

1 24. A method for distributing purchasing incentives to retail customers,
2 comprising the steps of:

3 maintaining a consumer purchase history database derived in part from
4 accumulated purchase data of identifiable consumers;

5 maintaining a consumer database that identifies consumers by their
6 electronic addresses;

7 generating purchase incentives for selected consumers; and

8 transmitting the purchase incentives to the selected consumers by
9 electronic mail.

1 25. A method as defined in claim 24, wherein:

2 the step of maintaining the consumer database includes obtaining
3 registration information from each consumer who logs in to a communications system
4 information site, and transferring electronic mail information to the consumer database.

1 26. A method as defined in claim 24, and further comprising the step of:

2 selecting consumers to receive at least one purchase incentive on the basis
3 of demographic data stored in the consumer database.

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5 displaying the promotional materials pertaining to product discounts at the
6 consumer's remote terminal;

7 receiving consumer selections of product discounts, made at the
8 consumer's remote terminal;
9 in response to the consumer selections, generating a token and transmitting
10 it to the consumer's remote terminal, wherein the token identifies the consumer as one
11 who has made online discounted product selections;
12 scanning the token in a retail store, together with items purchased by the
13 consumer;
14 verifying that the discounted items selected by the consumer at the
15 consumer's remote terminal were purchased by the consumer; and
16 generating a voucher that provides a cash discount to the consumer, the
17 cash discount being the total of all verified item discounts selected by the consumer.

1 30. A method as defined in claim 29, wherein:
2 the step of generating a voucher generates an instantly redeemable
3 voucher.

1 31. A method as defined in claim 29, wherein:
2 the step of generating a voucher generates a voucher that is redeemable
3 on a subsequent store visit.

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